

VA FUNDING HONORS COMMITMENT TO VETERANS

(Mr. ALTMIRE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ALTMIRE. Mr. Speaker, after years of neglect, this House is finally going to take up a VA funding bill that honors our commitment to our Nation's veterans. In contrast to the chronic underfunding that the VA has seen in recent years, this bill that we are going to talk about today has the largest increase in VA health care spending in the 77-year history of the program.

And for the first time, this bill exceeds the recommended funding level of the service organizations, the American Legion and the VFW.

Democrats continue to demonstrate our commitment that no group should stand ahead of our Nation's veterans when it comes time to make Federal funding decisions. This bill will help us clear up the 400,000-case backlog at the VA. It is going to help us avoid issues like what happened at Walter Reed, and it will give our veterans the care that they earned and the care that they deserve.

HONORING LIEUTENANT COLONEL GEORGE BROWN

(Mr. WELLER of Illinois asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of the life of Lieutenant Colonel George Brown of Morris, Illinois, a true American patriot. Lieutenant Colonel Brown passed away at the age of 86 in his home on June 6, 2007, on the 63rd anniversary of D-Day. He served in the U.S. Army from 1942–1964, and was a World War II veteran who also served in Korea. During his service, he received a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star.

A leader in his community, Lieutenant Colonel Brown spent many years as a well-respected member of the Grundy County Board where he was known to give full dedication to his job and cared about conservation and preservation issues.

Additionally, Lieutenant Colonel Brown educated children in our community about Native Americans by portraying Chief Shabbona, the leader of the Pottawatomie Indian tribe during the Black Hawk War, who is also buried in Morris, Illinois. He instructed these children that "we are symbols of current and past history, and we represent father, grandfather, brother and the authority figure, and they expect us to do the right thing."

Lieutenant Colonel Brown is remembered as a man of conviction and a pillar in our community, and I am proud to honor him today.

HISTORIC INCREASES IN VETERANS FUNDING

(Mr. SPACE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SPACE. Mr. Speaker, today this House will debate legislation that will help us fulfill our commitment to this Nation's service men and women, their families and our veterans. The Military Construction bill that comes to the floor today was unanimously approved out of the House Appropriations Committee last week. Not one Democrat or Republican opposed the measure.

That is because it provides the largest increase in funding for veterans health care in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration and includes other historic funding increases designed to meet the changing need of our Armed Forces.

Mr. Speaker, this bill unanimously passed out of the Appropriations Committee for a reason: it is a good bill and deserves the support of every Member of this House.

UPHOLD BORDER SECURITY FUNDS

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, last year House Republicans acted to stop the flow of illegal aliens into our country by passing five bills specifically addressing the current border crisis. Among these bills was the Secure Fence Act, a bill that among other things authorized more than 700 miles of two-layered reinforced fencing along the southwest border.

Sadly, this week, as the House considers the Democrat Homeland Security Appropriations bill, we find that included in this legislation is a provision allowing localities to "shut off" funding for this vital border fence.

As the debate regarding our immigration system continues to wage on, one thing we know for certain is that controlling our borders should come first to any effort we undertake. We welcome legal immigrants who follow the rule of law. But it is unfortunate Democrats are backtracking on the progress we have made. It is time to fund the fence.

In conclusion, God bless our troops and we will never forget September 11.

HISTORIC INCREASES IN VETERANS FUNDING

(Mrs. MCCARTHY of New York asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. MCCARTHY of New York. Mr. Speaker, for far too long our veterans have been left behind. In fact, last year the Republican Congress and the Bush administration proposed cutting fund-

ing for the operation and maintenance of veterans' medical facilities by \$464 million. Earlier this year, we saw the effects of these budget cuts manifested in the conditions of Walter Reed Hospital and other VA hospitals across the country.

Fortunately, this new Democratic Congress has a different set of priorities. We allocate the largest increase in funding for veterans health care in history, and we do it in a fiscally responsible way that does not produce budget deficits down the line.

The 2008 MILCON and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill includes \$70 million more than the President requested for veterans substance abuse programs, \$69 million more than he requested for medical and prosthetic research, and \$127 million more to address the 400,000-deep backlog of veterans benefits claims.

Mr. Speaker, we are finally keeping our promise to our veterans, not only to the veterans serving in Iraq and Afghanistan today, but all veterans.

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EARMARK REFORM

(Mr. DAVIS of Kentucky asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. DAVIS of Kentucky. Mr. Speaker, during the 109th Congress, Republicans enacted historic earmarking reforms that allowed Members to challenge and debate wasteful earmarks contained in spending bills on the House floor. This was a good step towards increased accountability and transparency in the earmarking process.

Last fall, Democrats campaigned on a pledge to make this the most ethical Congress in history. But, as they headed into their first appropriations season, we're confronted with the reality of their reforms. It seems that instead of increasing sunshine on how Congress is spending the American people's money, they prefer to create massive secret funds for earmarks that will be inserted into the bill after the votes have been taken on legislation.

And what is perhaps most egregious is the fact that they won't even let these earmarks, which are paid for with the American people's hard-earned tax dollars, be debated in the people's House.

This is not the most ethical Congress in history. This is a sham.

DEMOCRATS HAVE DIFFERENT FISCAL PRIORITIES THAN PRESIDENT BUSH AND SOME REPUBLICANS

(Ms. SHEA-PORTER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Mr. Speaker, President Bush claims there are important differences between Democrats

and Republicans when it comes to spending and he is right. For 6 long years, President Bush and the Republican rubber-stamp Congress slashed budgets in critical areas such as health care, college aid and support for our veterans.

For years, Republicans have cut veterans health care funding and budgeted billions less than they need. Last year, Republicans failed to even pass a bill to fund the Department of Veterans Affairs. Imagine that, did not even pass a bill.

After 6 years of Republican damage, Democrats will do things differently. This week, we begin to invest in America's priorities, and we're fiscally responsible.

While President Bush and the Republican Congress ignored the needs of America's veterans, the Democratic House will bring a bill to the floor that includes the largest increase in funding for veterans health care in the 77-year history of the VA.

Today, I would hope that this entire House would support our veterans by supporting this bill. It is long overdue, but the Democrats intend to deliver like our troops deserve.

WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO SHOW TAXPAYERS HOW THEIR MONEY IS BEING SPENT

(Mr. BARRETT of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. BARRETT of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, the very first reform passed by the new majority in the 110th Congress was a rule to create transparency publicizing projects earmarked for Federal money. Now the majority party is suggesting to the American people that it's okay to bury these earmarks in conference bills, which we know cannot be amended or challenged in any way.

Republicans last year brought more sunshine and transparency into this process, and instead of building on that, as promised by this new majority, Congress is taking a giant step backwards.

As a member of the House Budget Committee, I'm highly concerned that waiting until the very end of the law-making process to hide pork barrel spending is the simplest way to create a slush fund in the budget. This way of spending will lose America's trust.

Mr. Speaker, Americans have trusted us to spend their taxpayer money wisely and honestly. We have a responsibility to show them exactly how their money is being spent and defend it on the House floor.

DEMOCRATS SET TO APPROVE FOUR APPROPRIATIONS BILLS THIS WEEK THAT SET RIGHT PRIORITIES

(Mr. MORAN of Virginia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, this week the House should approve four appropriations bills that set the right priorities for our Nation and do it in a fiscally responsible manner.

Yesterday, we debated the homeland security bill, and we'll continue today, but we should make the public aware that beyond the issues that we seem to be distracted by, the main point about the homeland security bill is that it strengthens our borders by providing funds for 3,000 additional border patrol agents. It also prioritizes the need of our first responders while doubling the amount of cargo that will be screened at our airports.

Democrats are going to bring a veterans and a military construction bill to the floor that includes the largest increase in veterans health care funding in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration.

We will also be bringing to the floor the Energy and Water and Interior appropriations bills. Now the Democrats will address the important issue of global warming in those bills. These bills also show that, as Democrats, we recognize what a serious problem that is.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize, these bills were approved in committee with strong bipartisan support. They should receive that same kind of support here on the House floor.

OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE HOUSE

(Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, as we come today, it marks the one-quarter mark into the 110th Congress under now the new leadership of the Democrat leadership.

And what has this leadership wrought for the American public? During this time, firstly, the largest tax increase on the American family in U.S. history; secondly, a breaking of the rules, a breaking of the rules and the promises of transparency and openness that they made to the American public and that the GOP, the Republicans, began to initiate in the last Congress; and finally, we learned last night from this new majority, they bring to us slush funds, slush funds under the direction of one man on the other side done at the late end of night to control billions of dollars.

The Homeland Security bill that we were debating last night and will be debating today is too important to trivialize in this manner. It is too important to the American public, and it is too important to my constituents in the 5th Congressional District of New Jersey who live in the shadows of the World Trade Center.

Mr. Speaker, this past November election, the American public has spoken. They say they want openness, they want transparency. We demand it of this House.

HOW MUCH WORSE DO THINGS HAVE TO GET AT JUSTICE BEFORE REPUBLICANS HOLD HIM ACCOUNTABLE?

(Mr. PALLONE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, just how bad do things have to get at the Justice Department before congressional Republicans say enough is enough?

On Monday, Senate Democrats tried to bring up a vote of no confidence in Attorney General Alberto Gonzales. While seven Republicans supported an effort to allow for an up-or-down vote, the rest of the Senate Republican Caucus blocked it procedurally.

Are my Republican colleagues serious? Do they actually believe, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that this Attorney General can continue to serve as the Nation's leading law enforcement officer?

Let's not forget that Gonzales still does not remember why he fired eight U.S. attorneys last year. Nor should we forget that Gonzales tried to pressure then-Attorney General Ashcroft into signing off on the secret telephone surveillance program while Ashcroft sat in a hospital bed preparing for surgery.

Mr. Speaker, Democrats are restoring real accountability to Washington, but it would be nice if we could get a little help from our Republican friends.

CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER CAUCUS

(Mr. FORBES asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. FORBES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a member of the Congressional Prayer Caucus to formally acknowledge the importance of prayer in American life and history.

Today, I remind my colleagues, constituents and country of our need for prayer by reading a portion of the words offered on the floor of the United States Senate on June 13, 1947, by Peter Marshall. Mr. Marshall prayed:

"God of our fathers, in whose name this Republic was born, we pray that by Thy help we may be worthy to receive Thy blessings upon our labors.

"In this world where men have made deceit a habit, lying an art, and cruelty a science, help us to show the moral superiority of the way of life we cherish. Here may men see truth upheld, honesty loved and kindness practiced.

"We do not pray that other Nations may love us, but that they may know that we stand for what is right, unafraid, with the courage of our convictions.

"May our private lives and our public actions be consistent with our prayers.

"Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

PROSECUTOR GONE WILD

(Mr. POE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)